

29 March 2017
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“*Where in the World Is God? On Trial*”
Text: Numbers 14:1-23; Luke 22:66-23:25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

On trial. That’s *where in the world God is* for our consideration tonight. From the back of a donkey, to His knees in prayer, to His hands bound and under arrest, now He is on trial. And of all the places we have considered God to be thus far this Lenten season, while *under arrest* may have sounded and been the strangest, *on trial*, I would say, is the most common.

Yes, the most common, because in truth, the world has been putting God on trial from the very beginning and does so everyday. Submitting God to our questioning. Demanding that God explain His actions. Wanting God to justify what He is doing and why He is doing it. *Why are you doing this God? Why did you write that God? Why is this happening God? Wouldn’t something else be better God?* And the result of such questions is that people find God guilty - guilty of injustice, guilty of favoritism, guilty of inequality, guilty of hate and prejudice, guilty of intolerance, guilty of not being the loving God we think He should be.

So God must go. His Word (or at least parts of it) must go, His ways must go, His truth must go, so that we can move on to something better. The world doesn’t want that God anymore. That God just isn’t acceptable anymore. ***Crucify Him!***

It really is the same thing, isn’t it? What the Jews and Pilate and Herod and the people did to Jesus while He was walking among them in the flesh, and what many are still doing today. It really is the same thing, isn’t it?

As we heard tonight in the Holy Gospel, Jesus said He was God, but that claim offended them as it does many people today. Jesus spoke the truth and was accused of either lying to or misleading the people - as His Word is accused of today when it speaks against sins people like and cherish and don’t want to be sin. Jesus claimed to be King, but people then and now don’t want to be under His rule. They heard what He said and saw what He did and said *no*. He is guilty of breaking our laws, what we think is right and good and acceptable behaviour. So He must go. ***Crucify Him!***

The people of Israel did it too. As we heard in the first reading, ***ten times they put God to***

the test and did not listen to Him. And they would do so more after this. They put God on trial and didn't believe Him, didn't trust Him. Even though He had proved His goodness and faithfulness to His promises. Even though He brought them out of Egypt, divided the Red Sea, gave them water from a rock and manna to eat, protected them from their foes, and as He would later say, if that wasn't enough, if that were too little, He would have done so much more! No. **Crucify Him!** This God must go. We'll go back to Egypt, they said. That would be better, they thought. Had they forgotten had bad it was? Had they forgotten that they were slaves in Egypt? Did they really want to be slaves again?

Crucify Him! This God deserves the death penalty.

O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken (LSB #439)?

No law, of course. Pilate knew it. Three times he said to those who brought Jesus to him: **He is not guilty.** But sinful men aren't interested in justice or truth, only in getting what we want. So Pilate **delivered Jesus over to their will** - their sinful will. And Jesus - in His good and perfect will - willingly goes . . . to die. He becomes the guilty one, He suffers the death penalty, **to set free the very ones who judged and sentenced Him.**

But think about it this way too. In putting God on trial and submitting Him and His ways to our judgment, **we are judging the Judge.** We are judging the One who on the Last Day will judge the living and the dead, as we confess in the Creed. We should be held in contempt for that. Any human judge would do that.

But for this sin, too, Jesus was judged in our place. And not only judged, but punished and condemned. He took our place as the accused, as the condemned, as the punished, and as the executed. That all these things we deserve and all that we are truly guilty of, be forgiven. Given to Him and forgiven to us. The Judge is judged. The innocent one is declared guilty. The Life-giver is sentenced to death. **Crucify Him!**

So what about you? Have you put God on trial? Most certainly. We all have. It is quite easy to doubt God's love for us and accuse Him of wrong doing. Of that we need to repent.

But also *what about you* when others put you on trial? When you try to speak the truth and do the right thing, but are accused of being a bigot, of being a hater, of being a - phobe, of being prejudiced? Judges censured for doing just that. Business people put out of business for that. Churches sued for that. What then? *Where is the world is God?*

Well, at just such times, He is with you. The one put under trial for you is with you in your trial. And if this happens to you, He said: *Blessed are you* (Matthew 5:10-12)! Though you won't feel blessed. In fact, you'll feel cursed. You'll feel alone and forsaken and forgotten by God. But you're not. Because Jesus is right there with you. He stands before

the Church authorities and the worldly authorities, He is mocked and abused, and He is alone and forsaken. For you. With you. And that's why you're blessed. Because you're where He is. And where He is, is blessing. Even when that place is on trial. Even when that place is a cross.

So great comfort is ours tonight, as we consider God on trial. The comfort of His being there *for* us, for our forgiveness. And the comfort of His being *with* us here, still, for our salvation. Until the day He comes again, *seated at the right hand of the power of God*, and takes us to be with Him. When on that day the word that Pilate truly spoke of Jesus will be truly spoken *of us: I find no guilt in this man, in this woman*. And it will be true. Not because of you, but because of Him. Because the Judge who was crucified and then raised from the dead has pronounced His verdict: **you are forgiven**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.